

# Grammar Nuggets

## The Cost of **NOT** Proofreading

By Kathy Sieckman, PP, PLS, ACP

I read an article about a typo that cost the New York City transit system \$250,000 to replace maps that had an error in the minimum cost of the pay-per-ride card. Paying attention and proofreading are valuable skills in the marketplace. I wondered what other errors might have cost businesses and government agencies money and embarrassment that could have easily been prevented. Here are just a few examples that I found in my research:

- Proofreading errors have been made throughout history. The 1632 edition of the King James Bible left a word out that completely changed the meaning of the seventh commandment when that edition read "Thou shalt commit adultery." The printer was fined for the mistake and all copies of the Bible with the error had to be destroyed.
- Tattoo artists are sometimes sued for negligence in misspellings that are permanently inscribed in flesh. This happens much more frequently than one would think and the Internet is full of examples of error-ridden tattoos.
- The University of Wisconsin gave its 1988 graduates diplomas that said "University of Wisconsin."
- Air Canada used luggage stickers reading "This Baggage Has Been X-Rated at Point of Origin."
- Australian Publishing Company Penguin Group had to reprint a cookbook at a cost of \$18,500 because a recipe for pasta called for "salt and freshly ground black people."
- A trader on the Tokyo stock exchange in 2005 was too quick to place his order and traded 610,000 shares at 1 yen each instead of 1 share at 610,000 yen. That mistake cost his firm \$18.7 million.
- In 2010, a Chilean man authorized the production of 1.5 million 50-peso coins that misspelled the country's name as "C-H-I-I-E." The managing director of the Chilean mint was fired once the mistake was discovered. All 1.5 million of those coins remain in circulation to this day.
- In June 2010, the gift shop at Australia's Parliament House unpacked a delivery of mugs that had been ordered to celebrate Barack Obama's visit to Australia. The mugs, however, welcomed "Barrack Obama" in large letters. They lost approximately \$2,000 in expected revenue.
- A new water tower in the city of Stoughton, Wisconsin, was painted with the word "Stoughon." The contractor fixed his error free of charge.
- A clerical error in 2006 may have cost an Italian airline \$7.72 million USD. They advertised a flight from Toronto to Cyprus for \$39 instead of \$3,900. By the time they discovered the error, 2,000 tickets had been sold and the airline had to honor the price.
- In a ruling by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, Rogers Communications was ordered to pay Aliant Corporation about \$2.13 million Canadian dollars. Because of a comma in the contract, rather than the five year term Rogers Communications believed the contract set out, Aliant was able to cancel their contract at any time. One small comma separated a termination clause from a clause setting out terms of future renewals of the contract. That comma in the contract suggested the contract could be terminated before it actually expired. If there had been no comma there, it would have been clear that the right to termination applied only to the end of the contract that set telephone pole access fees and future renewals.
- L.L. Bean had delivered its back-to-school catalog to millions of homes. That catalog, unfortunately, asked its customers to call a phone number that was for a Virginia company and not L.L. Bean. Because of what I can only assume was a huge disruption in the Virginia company's business, L.L. Bean had to pay an unnamed amount of money to take immediate possession of the wrong phone number. Estimates are that it cost them six figures. What was the typo? A writer thought that a toll-free telephone number should always start with "800" and not the "877" number used by L.L. Bean.

Embarrassment factor aside, silly errors made because we are "too busy" to proofread can cost big money. Take the time, learn to proofread, and use that skill to help make you invaluable to your employer.

*Kathy Sieckman, PP, PLS-SC, ACP, has been a member of NALS for over 25 years and is currently serving as Chair of the Basic Legal Training Course Task Force and Co-Chair of the 2015 Las Vegas Conference Task Force. Kathy has a blog on proofreading tips at <http://proofthatblog.com>. If you have specific grammar issues you would like covered in future issues, please send them to Kathy at [proofthatblog@gmail.com](mailto:proofthatblog@gmail.com).*